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ABSTRACT

Historical information about the U.S. Department of Education and its forerunners is plentiful, but access to it is often difficult. The objective of this partially annotated bibliography was to compile references to this literature by categories that focus on specific facets of the Department of Education. Each category is divided into sections that contain references to: (1) articles and books; and (2) dissertations. The document also contains a brief history of this department's development. Materials are compiled under the categories of: (1) general works; (2) Alaska activities; (3) federal aid to education; (4) higher education; (5) minorities, women, and the handicapped; (6) the National Institute of Education; (7) miscellaneous programs and activities; (8) Henry Barnard, U.S. Commissioner of Education, 1867-1870; (9) John Eaton, U.S. Commissioner of Education, 1870-1886; (10) William T. Harris, U.S. Commissioner of Education, 1889-1906; and (11) other selected Commissioners of Education. (JHP)

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A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE LITERATURE ON THE HISTORY OF THE U. S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND ITS FORERUNNERS

by

Stephen J. Sniegoski

Historian
U.S. Department of Education

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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Introduction

The debate surrounding the 1979 creation of the U.S. Department of Education sparked strong public interest in the federal education agency's historical role, and a decade later that interest persists. For those wishing to explore this topic, information on the agency's origins is plentiful. Unfortunately, however, access to that information is often difficult, since much of it is contained in unpublished theses and relatively obscure journal articles. Thus, it is the objective of this bibliography to compile the literature on this subject in the hope that it will be a useful tool for the acquisition of knowledge, of value to the professional scholar and lay person alike.

The works included in this bibliography are those which treat the federal education agency in a historical dimension, as opposed to contemporary analyses. Entries are arranged by category, with each category focusing on a different facet of the agency. In addition, annotations have been kept to a minimum and are used only when titles do not adequately describe the topic. Because dissertations are often difficult to obtain, they are listed separately from articles and books.

Brief History of the Department of Education and its Forerunners

Although the United States Constitution says nothing about education, many of the Nation's Founders--including George Washington and Thomas Jefferson--believed that the Federal government should promote schooling. However, except for a few mild steps to foster education in the states, there was no federal agency specifically concerned with this important issue until after the Civil War. In 1867, during the era of Reconstruction of the defeated South, Congress created a small, autonomous Department of Education headed by a Commissioner of Education. Henry Barnard, the most celebrated educator of the day and a long-time proponent of a federal education agency, was selected as the first U.S. Commissioner of Education.

Although given the name of "Department," the agency did not possess Cabinet-level status, and various problems within the new entity rapidly sparked Congressional dissatisfaction and led to a subsequent loss of autonomy. By 1869, the Department of Education was reconstituted as an agency within the Department of the Interior and was renamed the Office of Education. The federal education agency remained in the Department of the Interior for 70 years, although under different names. In 1870, it became the Bureau of Education; in 1929, it was named the Office of Education once again.

In 1939, the Office of Education was removed from the Department of the Interior and lodged in the newly-created Federal Security Agency. This agency, in turn, was upgraded to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) in 1953, with the Office of Education being one of its major components.

Until the 1950s, the federal education agency remained a small entity devoted primarily to the collection and dissemination of information. There was one major exception, however. From 1884 to 1931, it administered an Alaska program which not only operated schools in Alaska, but maintained programs to aid the overall well-being of the Alaskan native peoples.

Beginning in the 1950s, the Office of Education grew markedly. Congress enacted numerous programs to aid education in the states and assigned the administrative duties for those programs to the agency. Staffing figures reflect this vast expansion. While the Office employed 286 people in 1947, by 1960, that number had swelled to nearly 1,100, and by 1966 it exceeded 3,100. This dramatic growth led to various changes in the structure of the federal education agency.

Between 1966 and 1970, for example, the HEW hierarchy included an Assistant Secretary for Education, who advised the Secretary of HEW on education matters, but who had no authority over programs in the Office of Education. Then, in 1972, Congress created a new educational research agency, the National Institute of Education (NIE), which was separate from the Office of Education. These two units formed equal parts of a new Education Division of HEW that was headed by an Assistant Secretary for Education. In theory at least, the Assistant Secretary for Education became the nation's highest federal education official, with the Commissioner of Education continuing to head the Office of Education.

In 1979, Congress, spurred on primarily by the efforts of President Jimmy Carter and by the National Education Association, created a Department of Education. Comprised primarily of HEW's former Education Division, the new agency was headed by a Secretary of Education and became part of the President's Cabinet. Its doors officially opened on May 4, 1980.

During the 1980 election, abolition of the nascent Department was a much-cited plank in the Republican Party's platform. Still, the Reagan Administration made only mild efforts to achieve this goal during its early years, and ultimately came to accept the Department's existence. Indeed, President Reagan's second Secretary of Education, William J. Bennett, gained the national spotlight for himself and the Department with his promotion of academic excellence.

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VI. National Institute of Education

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